

A Sibling Is A Lifelong Best Friend by urdearestmom

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Summary:

If there's one thing she knows she's taught her kids well, through trial and error and years of ups and downs, it's that loving each other and supporting each other is what's most important in a family. Her kids love each other, and that's all she ever wanted.

A Sibling Is A Lifelong Best Friend

Author's Note:

hello i had this idea last night and whipped it all up today!! the duffers like me to suffer so i had to give myself some wheeler family feels since they won't do it :)

hope you guys enjoy and please!!! comments feed me!!!! thank you!!!!

Before her second child is even born, Karen Wheeler knows that Nancy will love her sibling with all her heart. It's obvious one night when the family of three-soon-to-be-four is in the living room watching TV. Really, Karen is the only one watching it, and then afterwards she stops too. Her husband is asleep, and she thinks her daughter might be as well. After all, the girl is only just past three years old and she usually falls asleep before nine. Except when Karen looks down at her bulging stomach, she sees Nancy's face right next to it with her big blue eyes steadfastly trained on it.

"What are you looking at, sweetie?"

Nancy doesn't move her gaze. "Th' baby," she mumbles. "When does it come out?"

Karen smooths a hand down her dress. "Soon, honey," she says. "The doctor said close to the end of August. That's only in a little less than two months. Are you excited?"

Nancy nods, sitting back and leaning her little head on her mom's arm. "It's a boy. I want a sister, but a brother is okay."

Karen laughs quietly. "Well, we don't know if it's a boy. We'll have to wait and see when it's born."

"It's a boy," Nancy insists. "I know."

"Okay," her mother humours her. "What do you think we should name him?"

Nancy is silent for a little while, and Karen almost thinks she's fallen asleep, but then her tiny, quiet voice pipes up. "Can we name him Marshmallow? I like marshmallows."

Karen snorts. "We can't name him Marshmallow, that's not a person's name. Maybe you can think about it tomorrow, Nancy. You're tired."

Nancy stares at the TV blankly for a moment, letting it sink in that they will not, in fact, be naming her baby sibling Marshmallow. She turns her head to look up at her mother. "Can I feel him?"

As if in response to its sister's words, the baby kicks Karen's right side, where Nancy is sitting. "Well, it just kicked me right here," she answers, putting her hand where the baby kicked. "Maybe you *can* feel."

Nancy excitedly puts her left ear to her mother's stomach, lying in wait. The baby kicks on the other side, but Nancy gasps. "I feel it!"

Karen smiles. She hopes that her children will get along when they're older. It'll be nice for them to have a sibling to count on. A second later, the baby kicks on the right side again and Nancy's head jerks up. "He kicked my ear!"

She angrily crosses her little arms and scoots away from her mother's stomach. She stays that way until she falls asleep, but in the morning she's forgiven the baby and is just excited for it to come out so she can meet it.

When Nancy is five, she starts going to kindergarten. Karen drives her to school the first morning and after she goes into the building and her brother can't see her anymore, he puts a chubby little hand on the window and cries. When the two of them get home, Mike stubbornly refuses to get out of the car for fifteen minutes as if by sitting in there Nancy is going to magically reappear by his side. It's sweet how attached he is to his sister, but it's also a pain when Karen has more important things to do than convince her son to come into the house.

He does eventually come inside when he calms down, but spends the

morning upset. He retreats under the dining table where he makes a nest of blankets, taking with him a stray doll of Nancy's that was on the couch. His mother leaves him because by this point she's learned that Mike is the more stubborn of her two children and *will* throw a fit if she disturbs anything he's created.

It makes her want to cry a little later when she's thinking about whether Nancy is enjoying her first day of school. She looks under the table and sees her son's little lips wobbling as he strokes the doll's hair. She wonders if Nancy misses her little brother as much as he's missing her.

Around lunchtime, Karen's cutting up some bread for the kids' usual PB & J with apple juice, knowing that the school bus should drop Nancy off within the next fifteen minutes, when Mike crawls out from under the table and toddles into the kitchen.

He tugs on her skirt. "Mama?"

She looks down at him. "Yes, baby?" She asks, setting down the knife and reaching to pick him up.

He curls up on her, clinging to her neck. "When Nancy home?"

Karen pats his back soothingly. "She'll be home very soon, sweetie. The nice bus driver is going to bring her. Can you go watch by the door to see when she gets here?"

Mike immediately starts wriggling to get out of her grasp, so his mother sets him on the floor and he runs to the front door as fast as his short little legs will take him to stand guard until his sister gets back.

A few minutes later, Karen has set the table for lunch, so she makes her way to the front door where Mike has his face pressed up against the window. He can only just see over the bottom of it and he's standing on tiptoe, but he's making the effort to actually keep watch. A moment later, the school bus stops in front of their house and the toddler wrenches open the door as quick as he can (which is not very). He goes running down the path to the lawn, his hair flopping every which way.

“Nancy!” He screams, and he keeps running until he reaches Nancy getting off the bus, at which point he hugs her very aggressively and they both fall into the grass. The siblings come inside holding hands and with matching smiles plastered across their faces.

The same thing happens every day for the next two months, but eventually Mike learns that Nancy is indeed going to come back every day. It doesn’t make him miss her any less.

As he gets older, Mike develops a love for some fantasy role-play game that Karen can’t for the life of her remember the name of. He spends all of his free time in the basement concocting missions for “the party” (namely, his three friends), and has them over to play almost every weekend. Nancy is usually out with her best friend Barb, but sometimes she’s home and joins the boys in the basement. They’re all still kids, after all, but they’re growing up fast. Nancy is already eleven!

One night at dinner, the family is quietly eating when Mike’s cutlery clatters onto his plate. Karen looks at him in surprise. “Michael?”

“I just had *the* best idea for a campaign!” He exclaims. “Nancy, I need you to be part of it,” he adds, turning to his sister beside him.

Nancy scoffs. “No way am I joining your dumb game.”

Mike’s face falls and he goes back to his food. “S’ not dumb.”

Karen sends her daughter a stern look from across the table, but Nancy ignores it, primly cutting into her meatloaf. After dinner, Nancy’s helping her mother with the dishes when Karen decides to bring it up again.

“You shouldn’t talk to your brother like that,” she says, handing off a washed plate. “He already gets teasing from kids at school, he doesn’t need it from you too.”

Nancy shrugs as she dries the plate. “I don’t want to play, though.”

Karen sighs. “But you didn’t have to say it the way you did. You know he looks up to you? It would mean the *world* to him if his big

sister played a part in his story, even if it was just for a little bit.”

Her daughter pauses. “You think so?” She asks softly, turning those big blues on her mother.

“I know so.”

“Then I’m gonna talk to him. When I’m done the dishes.”

“Thank you, Nancy.”

When the dishes are done, Nancy goes down to where Mike is holed up in the basement and comes back up twenty minutes later yelling about how she needs to figure out how to dress as an elf.

About a week after, when Mike’s friends are over to play the game, Karen goes down to the basement to find all four of them and Nancy in stitches over something she hadn’t seen. She leaves the plate of crackers and cheese on a pile of books close to where they’re playing and goes back upstairs with a smile, receiving a “Thanks, Mommy!” a few moments later.

It’s really wonderful, she thinks, that Nancy and Mike are still quite so close. It’s not like it was when they were small and only had each other, because now they each have their own friends, but their mother can still clearly see the love they have for each other. She wonders what it’ll be like to have two teenagers living under the same roof.

She gets her answer, alright. Having one teenaged child is already complicated, but having *two*? It’s rough. Nancy and Mike are constantly fighting and scaring Holly, and since her husband is absolutely apathetic, Karen has to scold her two oldest and comfort the youngest at the same time. One day Mike doesn’t like Nancy’s boyfriend and gets into a fight with her about it, another day Nancy finds Mike and his friends too annoying. Sometimes Mike drops his socks on the stairs and Nancy starts a spat, other times Nancy’s on the phone too long and Mike gets angry. It’s so difficult and tiring to have to reprimand them all the time that Karen just starts letting them work their problems out on their own.

Mike's been kind of angry at everything for the last year and his mother doesn't know why. It started when Will came back after a week missing. The only thing she's sure of is that Nancy knows what happened, and it gives Karen hope for both Mike and Nancy's relationship as well as Mike himself. If he won't tell his mother, at least he told his sister.

One September evening, Karen is putting Holly to bed and she can hear murmuring from Nancy's room across the hall. She assumes it's just her daughter on the phone with someone again, although she has been on less and less since Barb went missing the year before. Quite understandably, it took a lot out of her. But then the murmurs raise in volume and Karen realizes it's actually Nancy and Mike talking.

"You don't get it! Nobody gets it!" Yells her son, before he walks out of the room and slams his sister's door. He whips past Holly's room and down the stairs, but not quickly enough for his mother to miss the tears he's wiping off his face.

A second later, Nancy emerges after him, stricken. She rushes off downstairs too, and Karen looks through to her room to see textbooks and Post-Its scattered on her bed. It must've been something serious if she let Mike interrupt her SAT studying.

Karen hears the front door open and close twice and then Nancy's voice shouting, "Mike!"

After leaving her youngest to chase sleep, Karen sits at her desk across from the kitchen island, holding a glass of wine and watching the door. Nancy and Mike return half an hour later, both with red eyes and arms around each other's waists. They both mumble a good night before heading upstairs without offering any kind of explanation.

It's worrisome that apparently, her children don't think they can trust her with their problems, but Karen acknowledges that they at least have each other and downs the rest of her wine.

After Nancy leaves for college, it seems like Karen's the only one who misses her. Six-year-old Holly gets over her sister leaving pretty

quickly, and Mike is busy with sophomore year. Ted has practically forgotten that Nancy even left.

Jane, Mike's girlfriend who prefers to be called El for some reason that has never been explained to Karen, starts coming around the house more often as she stops being homeschooled and begins high school with Mike and his friends. She's quite the lovely girl, always willing to help Karen or Holly with something even when Mike wants to keep her to himself. She's soft-spoken and shy for the most part, Karen doesn't know much about her other than she's the chief's adopted daughter and blatantly sweet on Mike.

It was a complete shock when Mike first introduced her to the family as such. He's only fifteen, after all, and they'd apparently been "dating" for a while. But all the same, Karen's glad to begin welcoming a new girl into the family. As one leaves, one arrives.

El becomes like a big sister of sorts to Holly in Nancy's place. Sometimes she comes over even when Mike isn't home, just to play with Holly. El babysits with Mike when Karen goes out, and she knows she can trust them both completely to have everything in order when she returns. It's very nice to have a girl around that she can depend on.

It doesn't strike Karen that Nancy's absence is noticed by the other occupants of their house until one afternoon in late November when she gets home from grocery shopping only to find Holly sitting at the desk holding the phone and grinning at her brother, who's leaning against the counter holding the other phone.

"Bye, Nancy!" Says Holly.

Mike laughs into the phone. "Yeah, we gotta go before the long-distance charges get too high. Love you, Nance. Yeah. Yeah, yeah, yeah. We'll see you soon. Bye."

Holly hangs the phone back up and waves. "Hi, Mommy!"

Mike turns around. "Oh, hey, Mom," he says, setting the phone into its cradle. "Me and Holly were just talking to Nancy. We missed her, so..."

"I can't wait till she comes home so I can have two big sisters!" Exclaims Holly. Mike affectionately pats her head and she goes into the living room to watch cartoons.

"Need any help?" Mike asks.

"Sure," says his mother with a smile. "I could use some."

When Nancy comes home for Christmas, Mike and Holly are both waiting by the door at her expected time of arrival. She'd opted not to come home for Thanksgiving, so her family hasn't seen her since she left at the end of August. Karen decides she'll leave her cookie dough for a little while and stand in wait with her younger children.

As their father's car pulls up to the curb with Nancy in the passenger seat, Holly yanks the door open and her brother follows her out into the snow, both of them yelling their older sister's name. They happily tackle her to the ground with hugs, and the three of them walk up to the doorway where their mother is standing. They're all holding hands, and it brings a grin to Karen's face when she tugs her eldest into a tight hug.

Inside, the four of them have decided they will bake cookies together. Nancy's using the nut-shaped cookie cutter and Mike's searching for the crescent moon one while Holly entertains herself rolling dough into balls and then flattening them. Karen is painting a thin layer of icing on cookies that are ready to go into the oven.

"You know," she says conversationally, "do you two remember when you were small and you used to bake cookies with me? You always fought over who got to use which cookie cutter until I told you nut starts with N like Nancy and moon starts with M like Mike."

Mike and Nancy look at their mother before shaking their heads. "I just always remember using this one," answers Mike.

Nancy smiles at the dough she's rolling out. "I was violently reminded of when I started school outside."

Holly drops a ball of dough and hops off her stool to get it while Mike furrows his brows in confusion.

“What are you talking about?” He asks.

Nancy laughs a little. “I remember when I started kindergarten you used to come outside and hug me every time I came home,” she responds. “That happened, right, Mom? I didn’t make that up?”

Karen nods fondly, now remembering herself. “He did that every day for about two months until he realized that you weren’t leaving forever.”

Mike groans in embarrassment, face flushing, but he doesn’t say anything.

Nancy grins and pokes his cheek with a flour-covered finger. “I always knew you loved me, little brother.”

Their mother chuckles on the other side of the island, watching as Mike helps Holly back up onto her stool. “Did I ever tell you that for the first week, every time we got home, he absolutely refused to get out of the car? It was as if you were waiting for your sister to appear,” she directs at her son. “You cried when we left her at school and then I had to call you and call you and beg for you to come inside before you did.”

Holly suddenly shrieks with laughter at the image of her big brother that that produces, so all four of them break into giggles. Hours later, Karen finds her three children curled up asleep on Nancy’s bed. Holly’s in the middle, her face tucked into her brother’s chest with her sister’s arms pressed against her back, while Nancy and Mike lie facing each other, one of Mike’s arms slung over both of his sisters and the other above his head, fingers brushing the ends of Nancy’s hair.

Karen sneaks downstairs to grab the camera before going back up and taking a photo cuter and more heartwarming than anything she could’ve ever imagined into existence. She gets the roll developed before Christmas, making small prints of that picture to give to her two oldest. She sees how their faces soften with affection on Christmas morning when they look at the photo and decides that it’s probably better than the other gifts she’s given them.

Before she leaves again, Nancy asks for a larger version of the same picture, so that she can put it in a frame and take it back to college with her to put on her desk to remind her of her siblings when she misses them. Mike keeps his little print in his wallet next to his picture of El, and both times it makes Karen tear up with the sentimentality of it all.

If there's one thing she knows she's taught her kids well, through trial and error and years of ups and downs, it's that loving each other and supporting each other is what's most important in a family. Her kids love each other, and that's all she ever wanted.

Author's Note:

please comment!!!!!! what was your favourite part?